



Congressman Tim Bishop

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Bishop Grills FAA on Stalled Response to Flight 800

Associate Administrator Commits to Date for Completed Safety Regulation

Washington, DC — Following Congressman Bishop's recent request, the House Subcommittee on Aviation held a hearing to address safety concerns at the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). During the questioning of witnesses, Bishop asked Nick Sabatini, the top safety official at the FAA, why the agency has delayed implementing safety upgrades that could avert fuel tank explosions similar to the cause of the TWA Flight 800 disaster on July 26, 1996. In response to Bishop's inquiry, the Associate Administrator committed the agency to issue its final regulation by September of 2007.

"Although we have waited more than a decade, I am pleased that the FAA has finally committed to a date certain by which the safety flaw that brought down Flight 800 will be fixed once and for all," Bishop said. "The families and friends of those who lost loved ones in the explosion of Flight 800 have waited too long for these safety changes, and I will push to make sure that the FAA stays true to its word."

In August of 2000, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), the independent government agency charged with investigating transportation catastrophes, determined that the explosion of Flight 800's center wing fuel tank caused the mid-flight break-up of the plane. The NTSB subsequently recommended the installation of fuel tank inerting systems to correct the problem. To date, the FAA has not implemented the NTSB recommendations.

John Seaman, President of the Families of Flight 800, thanked Bishop for his work. "This is a relief to the Families of Flight 800 to know that we have representatives who will hold the FAA accountable on behalf of the flying public in this country and throughout the world," Seaman stated.

Congressman Bishop introduced the Transport Aircraft Fuel Tank Safety Act (H.R. 4174) last year, which would require the FAA to implement a final regulation to mitigate center wing fuel tank flammability in aircraft. Shortly following introduction of the legislation, the Secretary of Transportation announced that the FAA would finally consider a regulation to deal with the flammability problem. At the safety hearing, the FAA announced that the regulation would be complete by September of 2007.

TWA Flight 800, which originated at JFK International Airport in New York and was bound for Paris, exploded over the south shore of Long Island, New York on July 17, 1996, killing all 230 passenger and crew on board. The event remains one of the worst air disasters in history and led to one of the most costly and extended investigations to date.

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